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ABSTRACT

This bulletin from the Center for Statistics (CS) attempts to shed light on the potential impact of new college eligibility requirements linking extracurricular participation to academic performance. The CS-sponsored longitudinal study, "High School and Beyond" (HS&B), was used as the data source for estimates; the information on coursework credits earned and grade point averages was taken from high school transcripts and questionnaires. Data shows that 80 percent of 1982 high school seniors participated in extracurricular activities. Except for hobby clubs and vocational education clubs, participation rates tended to be highest for students who were from high socioeconomic status backgrounds, who were pursuing an academic curriculum, and who made good (B+ or better) school grades. Differences in participation rates among racial-ethnic groups tended to be small. Two exceptions were varsity athletics and chorus or dance, with a higher percentage of black students participating. The more activities students were involved in, the higher they ranked academically, indicating that extracurricular activities attract many bright, high-performing students. An overwhelming majority of extracurricular activity participants would meet the requirements of a cumulative 2.0 grade point average (GPA). Included in the report are technical notes on methodology and charts relating extracurricular activity and student characteristics to percentage of 1982 seniors who had a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or more. (PS)

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Extracurricular Activity Participants Outperform Other Students

High school extracurricular activity programs have come under close scrutiny of late for a variety of reasons. For one, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has adopted new academic eligibility requirements for incoming freshman athletes. Effective in fall 1986, in order to play intercollegiate sports, a freshman will need to have graduated from high school with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0 on a 4-point scale. For another, the emphasis which the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE)[1] placed on raising high school standards appears to have stimulated school districts throughout the country to move toward more stringent academic requirements for student participation in all extracurricular activities, not just sports. An element of many new eligibility standards is the maintenance of at least a "C" (2.0) average. In addition, budgetary pressures due to various factors—including attempts to beef up the teaching of the "new basics" and implement other NCEE recommendations—may reduce support for extracurricular activities.

Proponents of higher academic standards for high schools and colleges say that linking extracurricular participation to academic performance will provide an incentive for students to pull up their grades. At the same time, others—including some parents and educators—say it's unfair, that such a policy would prevent students who do not have an academic bent from utilizing and developing the athletic, artistic, and other talents they bring to extracurricular activities. Besides, it may adversely affect student morale, they say. Others contend that while some activities (such as the school newspaper and debating) may offer good educational opportunities, the students who might benefit most from such activities tend not to become involved in them. This Center for Statistics (CS) bulletin attempts to shed light on the potential impact of some new eligibility requirements.

The CS-sponsored longitudinal study, "High School and Beyond" (HS&B), was used as the data source for all estimates. The estimates of coursework credits earned and grade point averages were based on high school transcripts; all other estimates were based on the questionnaire responses and test scores for 1980 sophomores who were seniors in 1982 (see Technical Notes).

Who Participates

Almost 80 percent of 1982 seniors reported taking part in at least 1 of the 11 activities identified in table 1. Over one-half participated in at least two activities, and one-third took part in at least three (see table 2). Thus, the involvement of high school seniors in extracurricular programs is extensive.

Seniors attending small schools participated in most activities at higher rates than those attending large schools—45 vs. 30 percent for varsity sports and 29 vs. 13 percent for journalistic activities.

Except for hobby clubs and vocational education clubs, reported participation rates tended to be highest for students who were from high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, for those who were pursuing an ac-

[1]The NCEE in its report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1983) recommended for high school graduation a minimum of at least the following amounts of coursework in the "new basics": 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies, and one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound student, an additional requirement of 2 years of foreign language in high school was strongly recommended.

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ademic curriculum, and for those who made good (B + or better) school grades (table 1). For example, 31 percent of seniors with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 (B +) or better, versus only 8 percent of those with a GPA of 2.0 (C) or less, belonged to the school's student council or a political club.

Differences in participation rates among racial-ethnic groups tended to be small. Two exceptions were varsity athletics (55 percent of black males vs. 44 percent of white males) and chorus or dance (higher percentages of blacks than whites for males and females).

School Performance

Students who ranked high on four related performance measures (course credits, hours of homework, test scores, and grade average) tended to be more involved in extracurricular activities. In fact, the more activities students were involved in, the higher they ranked (table 2). Students who reported participation in at least 4 of the 11 activities, in contrast to those who were not involved in any, earned 24 percent more credits in the "new basics" (12.9 vs. 10.4); were considerably more likely to have spent at least 3 hours per week on homework (64 vs. 36 percent); scored appreciably better on the HS&B tests (average score on vocabulary, reading, and mathematics tests); and were only one-third as likely to have had a GPA of 2.0 or less (10 vs. 30 percent).

The overall showing of participants on 4 performance measures exceeded that of all seniors for 9 of the 11 activity categories, the exceptions being hobby clubs and vocational education clubs (table 3).[2]

Certainly, participation in extracurricular activities does not guarantee improved performance as a student. What is clear, however, is that extracurricular activities are attracting many bright, high-performing students.

The Potential Impact of a GPA Requirement

Maintenance of at least a "C" average (2.0 GPA) appears to be the common thread among the new academic standards schools are requiring or considering requiring for participation in extracurricular activities. Hence, the remainder of the bulletin concentrates only on this one school performance measure.[3]

Most extracurricular activity participants tend to make good grades, so most would measure up to a nationally applied cumulative 2.0 GPA requirement. However, the impact on participation rates would be much greater for some groups of students than for others. The situation for participants in varsity athletics is probably typical. As table 4 shows:

- —Overall, nearly seven of eight varsity athletes meet or exceed the 2.0 GPA requirement;
- —A larger percentage of female than of male varsity athletes meet the requirement;
- —White students of high and medium socioeconomic status, and academic program students meet the requirement at high rates;
- —The groups hardest hit by the requirement are black and Hispanic males. However, about two-thirds of the black and Hispanic male varsity athletes meet the requirement.

Given these data—coupled with the high degree of visibility of certain extracurricular activities and the strong emotional support they enjoy—it is understandable that the move toward a 2.0 GPA requirement frequently generates intense and spirited debate among students, parents, coaches, teachers and administrators. However, an overwhelming majority of extracurricular activity participants would meet this requirement.

Technical Notes

High School and Beyond

The base-year survey was conducted in spring 1980. The study design included a highly stratified national probability sample of over 1,100 high schools with 36 seniors and 36 sophomores per school. (In those schools with fewer than 36 seniors or sophomores, all eligible students were included in the sample.) Cooperation from both schools and students was excellent. Over 30,000 sophomores and 28,000 seniors enrolled in 1,015 public and private high schools across the Nation participated in the base-year survey.[4] The samples represent the Nation's 10th and 12th grade populations, totaling about 3,800,000 sophomores and 3,000,000 seniors in more than 21,000 schools in spring 1980.

First follow-up survey data were collected in spring 1982 from a subsample of individuals who had been sampled for the base-year survey. Over 28,000 of the 1980 sophomore cohort members filled in first follow-up survey questionnaires—a response rate of 95 percent.

In fall 1982, high school transcripts were collected and processed for about 16,200 (88 percent) of the 18,500 sophomore cohort members subsambled for the transcript survey. The coursework credits and grade point average statistics presented in this bulletin were

[2]This in part could be due to a tendency of schools in 1982 to exclude students with poor grades from extracurricular activities.

[3]This bulletin examines only cumulative GPA, which is the basis for the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) plan, and not GPA for the preceding or current semester, which is the basis for the plans of many school districts.

[4]The overall response rate for schools was 91 percent; for sophomore cohort questionnaries it was 84 percent.

derived from the transcript file; all other statistics are based on student questionnaire responses and test scores.

Further information about sample design and response rates may be found in *High School and Beyond 1980 Sophomore Cohort First Follow-Up (1982) Data File User's Manual,* available from CS (address below).

Extracurricular Activities

Estimates of extracurricular activity participation and leadership rates are based on responses of 1982 high school seniors to the question, "Have you participated in any of the following types of activities either in or out of school this year?" For each activity listed, the student was asked to mark one of three response options: "Have not participated"; "Have participated actively (but not as a leader or officer"; or "have participated as a leader or officer".

School Size

Schools were categorized by size based on fall 1981 grade 12 membership data reported by schools: small (200 or fewer students); medium (201 to 500 students); and large (over 500 students).

Race Ethnicity

Students were classified as Hispanic if they indicated this to be their ethnicity in either the 1980 or the 1982 questionnaire. The remaining students then were classified by race (self-report).

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

A composite SES value was calculated for each student by averaging the standardized value for the student on five component items: father's education; mother's education; family income; father's occupation; and number of home possessions. Three SES categories then were formed: low (bottom quartile of the weighted distribution); medium (middle two quartiles); and high (top quartile).

Curriculum

Seniors were classified by curriculum based on their responses to the question: "Which of the following best describes your present high school program?" The major response options were "General," "Academic or college preparatory," and "Vocational (Occupational preparation)."

Grade Point Average

Cumulative grade point averages were calculated by CS from the high school transcripts collected in fall 1982 for a subsample of HS&B 1980 sophomore cohort participants. Detailed information about the transcript file may be found in *High School and Beyond Transcript Survey (1982) Data File Users Manual,* available from CS (address below).

Credits Earned in New Basics

The National Commission on Excellence in Education in its report, *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1983), recommended that all students seeking a diploma devote more time to learning the "new basics" (i.e., English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science plus foreign languages for the college-bound). The number of credits earned was calculated by CS from the high school transcripts for a subsample of HS&B sophomore participants. Information in the course classification scheme is contained in *A Classification of Secondary School Courses,* available from CS (address below).

Homework

Based on their responses to the question, "Approximately what is the average amount of time you spend on homework a week?" seniors were classified into two categories: 3 hours a week or less; and more than 3 hours per week.

Composite Test Score

A composite test score was calculated for each student by averaging the student's standardized scores on the HS&B first followup vocabulary, reading, and mathematics tests. Three categories then were formed: low (bottom quartile of the weighted distribution); medium (middle two quartiles); and high (top quartile).

Precision of Estimates

Since the statistics presented are based on a sample, they may vary from the figures that would have been obtained if a complete survey, or census, had been taken using the same forms, instructions, and procedures. Chance accounts for differences between a statistic herein estimated from a sample and its corresponding census value. Sampling or chance variation is measured by the standard error. The chance that a sample estimate will differ from the census value by more than one standard error is approximately 1 out of 3, and the chance it will differ by more than two standard errors only about 1 out of 20. The standard error does not take into account the effects of biases due to nonresponse, measurement error, processing error, or other systematic errors that would occur even in a complete survey.

The standard errors of the estimates presented in this bulletin are a function of the HS&B sample design, student subgroup size, and the amount of variation of the variable among students within a school and among schools. Estimates of standard errors were calculated for each statistic and are available from CS upon request.

All group differences cited in the text are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

For More Information

For more information about this bulletin, contact Jeffrey A. Owings, Education Outcomes Division, Center for Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208, telephone (202) 626-9154.

For information about High School and Beyond, contact David A. Sweet at the same address, telephone (202) 626-9148.

Table 1.—Percentage of 1982 seniors who participated in extracurricular activities, by selected school and student characteristics*

Subgroup	Any extracurricular activity	Varsity athletic teams	Cheerleaders, pepclub, majorettes	Debating or drama	Band or orchestra	Chorus or dance	Hobby clubs	Honorary clubs	Newspaper, magazine, yearbook club	Subject-matter clubs	Student council, government, political club	Vocational education clubs
All 1982 seniors	79	36	14	13	14	20	20	16	18	20	16	24
Grade-point average												
3.51—4.00	96	42	21	19	23	24	16	75	33	37	31	20
3.01—3.50	88	40	18	18	19	21	16	32	24	26	23	22
2.51—3.00	81	35	13	13	14	19	20	7	20	18	16	24
2.01—2.50	76	34	12	11	11	19	20	3	14	17	12	27
2.00 or less	68	30	9	9	9	18	21	3	9	16	8	23
Men: Race/ethnicity												
White	76	44	4	11	12	10	23	13	14	15	13	19
Black	79	55	4	12	17	18	24	11	12	22	15	24
Hispanic	76	46	6	11	12	12	27	8	12	18	13	25
Asian	73	41	3	6	11	8	29	28	13	26	15	5
American Indian	75	33	3	9	28	9	37	11	10	17	10	39
Women: Race/ethnicity												
White	83	26	23	16	16	27	16	21	25	24	19	25
Black	82	25	27	15	15	16	16	14	20	26	24	35
Hispanic	77	23	22	12	13	27	18	11	19	27	18	31
Asian	77	22	12	16	15	23	19	32	26	28	26	11
American Indian	76	22	21	9	7	21	31	7	30	16	12	28
Socioeconomic status												
High	85	44	14	19	16	22	21	25	25	22	23	14
Medium	79	35	15	12	15	19	21	14	17	20	15	25
Low	75	29	12	9	10	18	18	9	15	20	12	32
Curriculum												
Academic	87	45	15	17	17	23	20	26	25	25	24	14
General	72	32	13	12	13	19	21	7	16	16	11	22
Vocational	74	26	12	8	11	16	20	7	12	18	10	39
School size												
Small	87	45	19	17	17	23	19	18	29	22	20	30
Medium	77	33	13	12	13	18	20	15	15	21	16	22
Large	73	30	10	11	12	17	20	15	13	18	14	19

*See "Technical Notes" section of this bulletin for explanation of student characteristics.

Table 2.—Participation rates and school performance of 1982 seniors, by number of 11 possible activity areas in which they participated during their senior year

Number of activities	Percentage of seniors			Mean credits in new basics	Mean HS&B composite test score
	Percentage of total	With at least 3 hours per week homework	With GPA of at least 2.0		
Total	100	—	—	—	—
None	21	36	70	10.4	48.6
One	26	42	78	11.2	50.0
Two	20	51	84	12.1	51.4
Three	14	59	89	12.5	52.5
Four or more	19	64	90	12.9	53.2

—Not applicable.

Table 3.—School performance of extracurricular activity participants, by performance measure, by activity: 1982 high school seniors

Extracurricular activity	Percentage with at least 3 hours per week on homework	Percentage with GPA of at least 2.0	Mean credits in new basics*	Mean HS&B composite test score
All seniors	49	81	11.6	50.9
Varsity athletics	55	84	12.5	52.3
Cheerleaders, pep club majorettes	58	88	12.0	50.7
Debating or drama	62	88	12.7	54.1
Band or orchestra	57	88	12.2	52.5
Chorus or dance	59	83	11.8	51.1
Hobby clubs	53	80	11.6	50.5
Honorary clubs	73	96	14.4	57.7
School newspaper, magazine, etc.	62	90	12.9	53.7
School subject-matter clubs	61	86	12.7	51.9
Student council, student government, etc.	65	91	13.1	53.8
Vocational education clubs	42	82	10.5	48.0

*Courses in English, mathematics, science, social studies, computer science, and foreign languages were included in these calculations.

Table 4.—Percentage of 1982 seniors who had a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or more, by participation in varsity athletics and any extracurricular activity, by selected student characteristics

Subgroup	Varsity athletics		Any activity	
	Participants	Nonparticipants	Participants	Nonparticipants
All students	85	81	88	72
Male students				
White	87	78	89	71
Black	64	61	65	47
Hispanic	68	68	75	61
Female students				
White	94	89	93	82
Black	75	72	77	57
Hispanic	82	76	81	73
Socioeconomic status				
High	92	88	93	80
Medium	84	82	88	73
Low	76	74	80	65
Curriculum				
Academic	92	91	94	84
General	79	75	84	64
Vocational	74	75	76	68